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360zine

Issue 25 | December 2008

Free Magazine For Xbox 360 Gamers. Read it, Print it, Send it to your mates...

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW & INTERVIEW

HALO WARS™



PREVIEW!
CHAMPIONS
ONLINE



PREVIEW!
BATMAN:
ARKHAM ASYLUM



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THE
LAST
REMNANT

EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW
Massive hands-on guide inside...



HANDS-ON PREVIEW
RESIDENT EVIL 5

CONTROL →





|02

Welcome to 360Zine



Halo Wars is shaping up nicely and looks set to do for RTS what Halo did for First Person Shooters. Don't miss our hands-on preview and exclusive interview... Also on its way is Resident Evil 5: the console colossus is looking every bit as good as we'd hoped for and again you can read the full account of our hands-on preview.

On the reviews front there's a quality foursome of titles vying for your cash this month - Call of Duty: World At War is already flying off the shelves at Gatling gun speed, and with good reason. We also have Tomb Raider Underworld for your perusal along with Mirror's Edge and WWE SmackDown vs RAW 2009.

Enjoy the issue, your new dashboard and the upcoming festivities. Our next edition of 360Zine will be with you on January 13th, but in the meantime, do keep in touch...

**360Zine
FEEDBACK!**
Click here to tell us what you think of the new issue

Dan Hutchinson, Editor
360zine@gamerzines.com

MEET THE TEAM

Probably the best games writers on the planet



Chris Schilling
Reflecting on EA's Mirror's Edge



Steve Hill
Having it large in Halo Wars



Keri Allen
Living it up with Lara's latest adventures

Don't miss! This month's top highlights

Halo Wars
HANDS-ON PREVIEW & INTERVIEW

Mirror's Edge
EA's latest rated

Resident Evil 5
Coming soon...

Tomb Raider: Underworld
Lara's latest reviewed & rated

Call of Duty: World At War
Reviewed inside...

QUICK FINDER

Every game's just a click away!

Batman:
Arkham Asylum
Champions Online
This is Vegas
Stormrise
Raven Squad
Street Fighter IV
Sega Mega Drive
Ultimate Collection
Halo Wars
Resident Evil 5
Call of Duty:
World at War
Tomb Raider:
Underworld
WWE SmackDown
vs. Raw 2009
Mirror's Edge

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If you are reading this, then you didn't choose "Play" when Adobe Reader asked you about multimedia when you opened the magazine.

Without the multimedia playing, the magazine will look correct, but you will be missing out on all of the extra content built into each issue, like videos, animated screenshots, annotations, quizzes, competitions and more.

We recommend you close and re-open the magazine and select "Play" when asked about the multimedia to enjoy the magazine as intended.



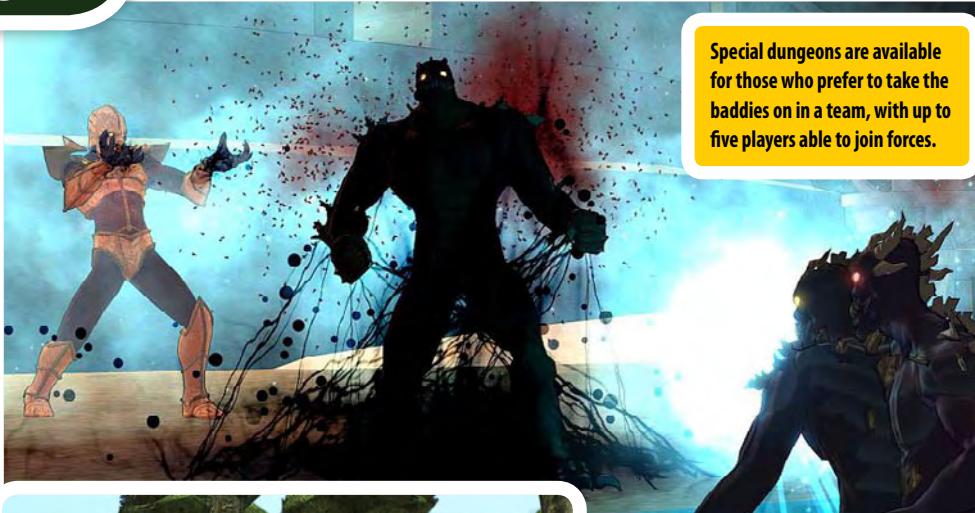


Previews



Publisher: 2K Games

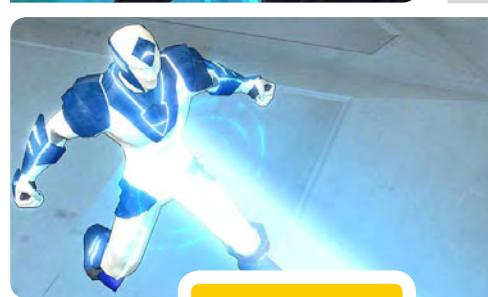
Developer: Cryptic Studios

Heritage: City of Heroes,
City of VillainsLink: www.champions-online.com
ETA: 2009

Special dungeons are available for those who prefer to take the baddies on in a team, with up to five players able to join forces.



Though there's plenty of hardcore stat-building, the emphasis is certainly on escapist fun – particularly given some of the garish costumes on display.



You can choose to increase the potency of your existing powers or expand your range of abilities as you level up.



"The character customiser is a real sight to behold, allowing for a remarkable range of heroes to be created"

FIRST LOOK

Champions Online

Cross-platform superheroics

What's the story?

The game's title says it all – the popular pen-and-paper RPG Champions has now been made into a videogame. It's a massively multiplayer online role-player from the maker of likeable PC MMO City of Heroes, Cryptic Studios.

What do we know?

You don't often see too many MMOs on consoles, and certainly not ones in which 360 owners can play against PC gamers, but that's what Champions Online is. Cryptic has made sure fans of the tabletop game are well-served, while also providing the kind of deep experience demanded by PC fans, with the accessibility needed for a successful console RPG. Indeed, while it's clearly been difficult to squeeze all the relevant commands onto a controller, it seems that the combat is best suited to a 360 pad, with button attacks feeling more pleasingly physical than the average clickfest that makes up most MMO skirmishes. Its cel-shaded world is nicely stylised if not particularly detailed, but that allows for plenty of onscreen characters and effects, keeping the action busy and exciting.

When do we get more?

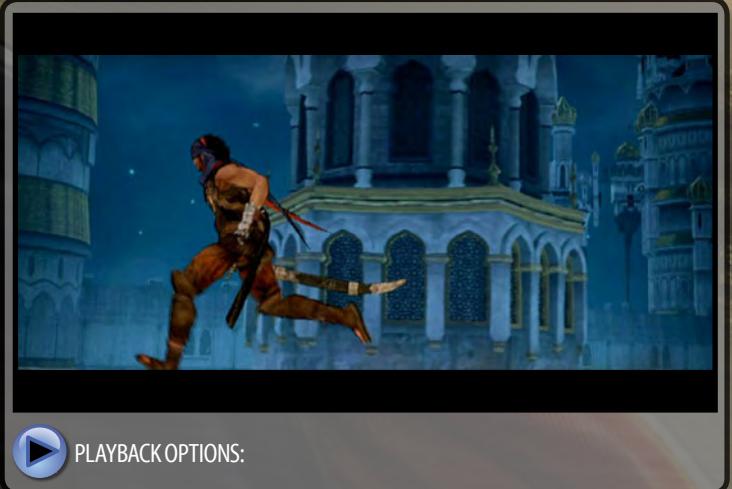
There's an online beta ongoing currently which should allow Cryptic to iron out any wrinkles and adjust the mechanics slightly – like tweaking the spread of skills and powers – according to feedback from its players.

Anything else to declare?

The character customiser is a real sight to behold, allowing for a remarkable range of heroes to be created – you'll even be able to choose their backstory, though how that affects your avatar remains to be seen.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Champions Online

"BURSTING WITH IMAGINATION AND POTENTIAL, PRINCE OF PERSIA IS SURELY UP THERE WITH THE MOST PROMISING TITLES IN DEVELOPMENT"
- EUROGAMER -



PLAYBACK OPTIONS:

Prince of Persia®

COMING DECEMBER 5TH



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CONTROL ➔





Previews



Publisher: Eidos
 Developer: Rocksteady Studios
 Heritage: Urban Chaos: Riot Response
 Link: www.rocksteadytd.com
 ETA: 2009

There's a Fifties comic book style to the visuals, which even at this stage look seriously accomplished.



The Joker's goons won't cause Batman too many problems on their own, but a group attacking simultaneously might.



"Batman's combat and gymnastic skills make him a formidable character to control"



FIRST LOOK

Batman: Arkham Asylum

Why so serious?

What's the story?

Gotham's famous loony bin is the setting for the latest videogame attempt to capture the essence of the Caped Crusader. As our hero ventures into the asylum, he's led into an ambush by arch-nemesis The Joker, and indeed it seems as if many of DC Comics' most well-known supervillains are present, ready to tackle our hero on their own territory and their own terms.

What do we know?

It's telling that one of the best attempts to realise Batman in videogame form is Activision's LEGO Batman, the Caped Crusader having been very poorly served so far by developers, who've failed to realise what makes this Dark Knight tick. So it's heartening to see that Rocksteady Studios (creators of the terrific Urban Chaos: Riot Response) seems to be on the right track, creating a game that uses stealth effectively as the Bat moves between the shadows, taking down enemies with deadly efficiency. His combat and gymnastic skills make him a formidable character to control, able to take down multiple enemies quickly, but he's realistically human – foes with guns can't just be tackled head-on.

When do we get more?

The release date is simply '2009' at the moment, but expect to hear something more concrete in the next few months.

Anything else to declare?

The game uses the Unreal Engine 3 to impressive effect, with detailed, stylised visuals and dynamic lighting. Batman himself may be the greatest videogame recreation of the character ever seen.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
[Click here to tell us what you think of Batman: Arkham Asylum](#)

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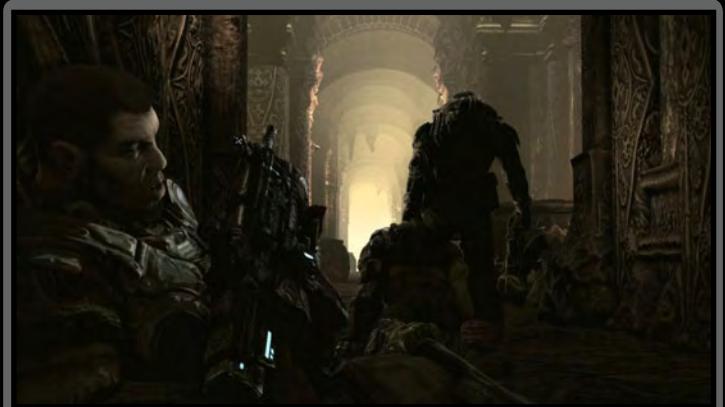
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Jump in.

XBOX 360

CONTROL ➔





PLAYBACK OPTIONS:

"Gears Of War 2 will blow you away"

Zoo

"Gears Of War 2 is the definition
of a must-have game"

X-360 Magazine, 10/10

"The finest action game of the year"

Gamesmaster, 95%

"Yet another huge hit on Xbox 360"

Daily Star

"Bigger, better, bloodier - get some!"

FHM

"The most exhilarating game of the year"

OXM, 9/10 Must buy

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18



Microsoft
game studios

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Jump in.

XBOX 360 LIVE

CONTROL ➔





Previews



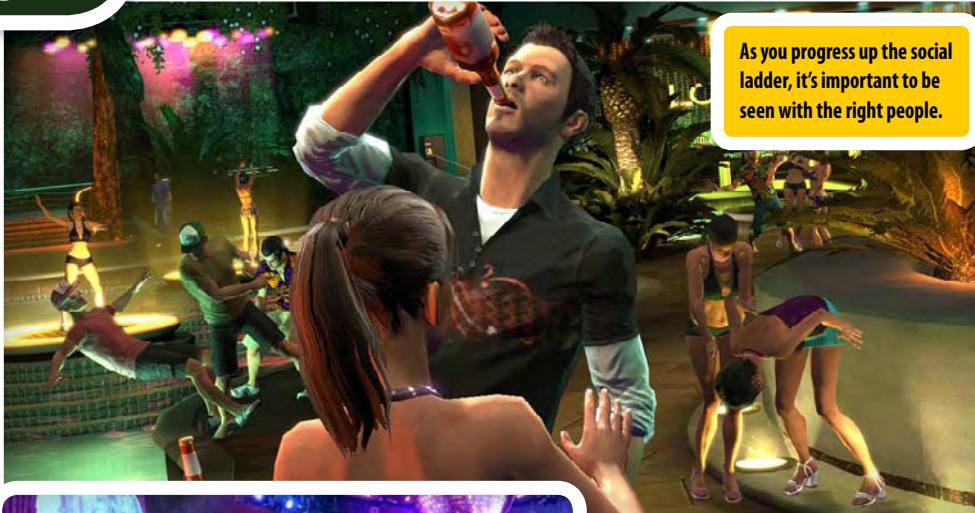
Publisher: Midway

Developer: Surreal Software

Heritage: The Suffering

Link: www.vegas.midway.com

ETA: 1st February 2009



As you progress up the social ladder, it's important to be seen with the right people.



It's important to muck in at the places you own, whether you help out behind the bar or act as bouncer to get rid of any riffraff.



OlympusCasino_S_Cam003

Table 006

08.24.08

TOP 20 22.5%

Gambling plays a big part in raising your bank balance – you stand the most to gain from this, though less riskier pursuits are available if you're out of luck on the card tables.



"This is Vegas is more interested in Craps than crack, with gunplay replaced with Poker"

FIRST LOOK

This is Vegas

Vice City Part Two?

What's the story?

The City of Sin is going all family-friendly, as a rich mogul attempts to change Vegas' image. No, it's not installing Wii consoles in every casino, but instead you'll find the millionaire's playground being slowly turned into a tourist trap to take the kiddies to. That might not seem like such a bad thing, but your character has apparently taken umbrage to this move and is determined to return the place to its more adult former glory. Will he succeed in cleaning the place up? That, my friend, is down to you...

What do we know?

Could it be fair to say that Grand Theft Auto minus all of the violence plus socialising equals This is Vegas? Well, that's pretty much what you're looking at here. Midway's game is more interested in Craps than crack, with gunplay replaced with Poker as you attempt to make contacts, increase your funds via wins at the roulette or card tables, and increase your reputation so you become one of the big players behind the scenes. That's not to say

that there won't be any of the old ultraviolence, though you won't see much popping caps in asses as handing out beatings to rivals to prove your own strength and impressing the ladies. There are guns, but you won't be finding too many bloodbaths along the neon-glazed strip.

When do we get more?

Midway has the game down for an early February release, though little has been seen of the game recently, so there's a chance it could slip.

Anything else to declare?

It wouldn't be Vegas without being able to drive an expensive sports car – and indeed you'll be able to enter into underground races to earn more cash.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of This is Vegas

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XBOX 360 LIVE

PLAYSTATION 3

PSP



NINTENDO DS

DS

DS



CONTROL ➔





INCOMING

A fistful of top new titles coming to 360...



Sega Mega Drive Ultimate Collection

Publisher: Sega | ETA: First half 2009

Retro fans should be in heaven with this amazing compilation of some of Sega's best-known titles all on one disc. There are 40 titles from the 16-bit era, including Sonics 1, 2 and 3, Ecco and the Streets of Rage games.



Street Fighter IV

Publisher: Capcom | ETA: 20th February

Expect to hear more about this one soon, but we now have a confirmed date for the home console versions of this modern-day arcade classic. Just eight short weeks after Christmas you'll be able to spend your GAME vouchers on the 360 port, which looks to be the best 2D beat-'em-up since, well, Street Fighter III.



Stormrise

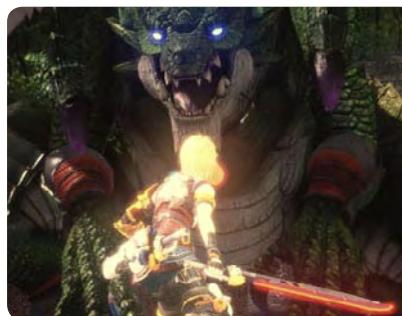
Publisher: Sega | ETA: First half 2009

Post-apocalyptic worlds are the new lens flare in videogaming these days, but the latest from Total War makers The Creative Assembly offers more originality in other areas, with an unprecedented level of verticality in its RTS mechanics, with players able to command air vehicles, rooftop troops and even underground units – and all from a more hands-on perspective.

Dynasty Warriors Gundam 2

Publisher: Koei | ETA: 31st March 2009

Two very Japanese loves collide once more in the sequel to the cult mech-'em-up which saw hundreds of gigantic robots do battle in hugely enjoyable ways. We just can't get enough of this frenetic, fast-paced destruction, and so the news that we've only to wait until March for another fix fills us with deep joy.



Star Ocean: The Last Hope

Publisher: Square-Enix | ETA: March 2009

After the slightly underwhelming Infinite Undiscovery, developer tri-Ace returns to probably its best-loved series, with the follow-up to the wonderful Till the end of Time, set to hit 360s early next year. It's yet another string to the 360's bow and another game which should increase the console's popularity in Japan.



Raven Squad

Publisher: SouthPeak Games | ETA: Early 2009

This curious hybrid of RTS and FPS certainly looks intriguing, allowing you to get your hands dirty instead of just giving orders and watching the results. Whether it's deep enough for hardcore strategists or appropriately intense for action lovers remains to be seen, but the seamless transition between the two is a very nice touch.

UPCOMING

JANUARY

- Lord of the Rings: Conquest
- RACE Pro

FEBRUARY

- Bionic Commando
- Halo Wars

QUARTER 1 2009

- Precursors
- White Gold: War in Paradise

SPRING 2009

- Dungeon Hero
- UFC 2009 Undisputed

“...THIS IS THE TOMB RAIDER
WE’VE BEEN WAITING FOR”



“OUTSTANDING” 360

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PLAYBACK OPTIONS:

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Wii

NINTENDO DS

PlayStation 2

PLAYSTATION 3



CRYSTAL
DYNAMICS

eidos

CONTROL ➔





Previews



Publisher: Microsoft

Game Studios

Developer: Ensemble
StudiosHeritage: Age of Empires,
Age of MythologyLink: www.halowars.com

ETA: February 2009

HANDS ON

Halo Wars

It was 20 years ago today...

It's difficult to imagine where the Xbox would be today if it wasn't for Halo. The game that launched the machine, it proved beyond any doubt that a first-person shooter could not only work on a modern console, but comfortably surpass many of its more established PC-based counterparts. It's particularly surprising then to note that early designs of Halo had it as a real-time strategy game, essentially a science fiction version of Bungie's hack-'em-up, Myth. Ironically, the whole thing has now come full circle, with developer Ensemble claiming that Halo Wars will do for the RTS what the original Halo did for the FPS.

It's a bold assertion, but Dallas-based Ensemble Studios know a thing or two about strategy games. Best known for PC behemoth Age of Empires, it's perhaps a sign of shifting trends that Halo Wars will be the developer's final game, as Microsoft has announced that the studio is being shut down once the title is released. The team is adamant that they won't simply be phoning their work in over the next few months however, and

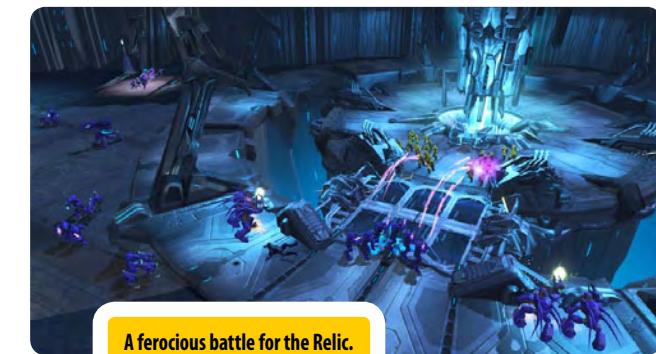
"The developers claim that Halo Wars will do for the RTS what the original Halo did for the FPS"



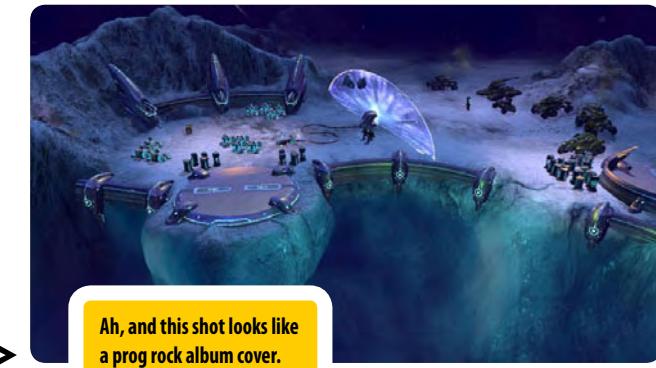
Looks very much like a Covenant stronghold.



It's like Halo, but from above.



A ferocious battle for the Relic.



Ah, and this shot looks like a prog rock album cover.

confirmed that the downloadable content would still be available

Prior to some last-minute polishing, they turned up mob-handed in London to show off the latest build. Demoing the game in the Royal Observatory, Greenwich, it provided a

suitably cosmological setting for the cod mythology of the franchise, with the eerie title music reverberating around the darkened dome-shaped auditorium. As they were keen to stress, the sound and feel is crucial to the Halo experience, with combat featuring

>



Previews

HALO
WARS

That should warm them up.

"There's no Master Chief, not even hidden away as a secret character"



Pick the bones out of that lot.

> Halo Wars continued

the familiar noises, as well as such details as grunts talking at you, and the obligatory funny lines.

It all takes place on a grand scale, with a backstory to match. Taking place

20 years before the events of the original Halo, you're in charge of the crew of United Nations Space Command ship Spirit of Fire as they encounter the pesky Covenant, who have attacked a planet called Harvest, bombing it for years and causing an



atomic winter, as reflected in the surrounding snowy screenshots.

Of course, it wouldn't be a Halo game with the detached voice of a sassy female telling you what to do. Step up to the mic, Serina, described as a spirited artificial intelligence persona. And while you are in charge of the UNSC, we'd better tell you now that Master Chief does not feature in the game. That's right, no Master Chief, not even hidden away as a secret character. Furthermore, you don't even switch sides at any stage, which could be a good thing, as during the constant swapping in Halo 2 you didn't know if you were Arthur or Martha.

In the Halo Wars campaign, you will play exclusively as the good guys, a decision apparently born out of disgust with vintage strategy game Warcraft III, where you suddenly became evil

halfway through. Covenant fans will be catered for in the multiplayer however, as they take on the do-gooders, with skirmishes supporting up to six players over what used to be called Xbox Live, but is now what we are legally obliged to call New Xbox Experience.

We're not here for the multiplayer, though. We're here to squat on a beanbag, ask someone what the keys >

Call in an air attack for extra support.





Previews

HALO
WARS

They like a bit of purple.

"At its most basic level, the combat is mainly a case of pointing the good guys at the bad guys and letting them get on with it"



The level of detail in the game is truly impressive.

> Halo Wars continued

are, and stumble through the opening three levels without embarrassment. The tutorial is a doddle, with a big arrow pointing the way and individual units selectable. In traditional RTS fashion, your entire army can be selected with a press of a shoulder button, and crucially, only every unit on the screen can be selected with the other. It's idiot-proof, and even a bloke from a waning men's magazine managed to get to the second level.

Having breezed through the tutorial, the next mission is more time-consuming, although in our defence we spent a lot of time dicking about with a secondary objective that involved establishing a second base. There's no harvesting involved, although there are restrictions in terms of supplies and so forth. As for the all-important combat, at its most basic level it's mainly a case of pointing the good guys at the bad guys and letting them get on with it. Subtleties are in evidence however, with troops taking cover behind upturned vehicles, employing super-weapons, or if it all gets too much, requesting that the Spirit of Fire helps out with a bit of carpet bombing. There was also an appearance for the RTS staple of



Heroes, who in this case can be healed by having their mates stand near them.

As the franchise would demand, Halo Wars appears to be an all-action affair. Absorbing yet accessible, intuitive yet deep, it was almost worth going south of the river for. ●

Fans of the series will recognise these vehicles immediately.



Base building is a big part of the game.

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Halo Wars

360Zine

HALO WARS

HOW COMPLETE?

90%

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

80%

FPS? RTS? This is one genre jumper that could work



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HALO POLISHING

We spoke to **Graeme Devine** from Ensemble Studios about the daunting task of bringing Halo to a new genre...



Could this be a classic RTS? Time will tell.



Like Halo, but
only from above.

You recently claimed that the control system in **Halo Wars** would be better than even a PC-based real-time shooter. That's a ridiculously bold statement. How are you going to back that up?

I think you'll be able to back that up for me when you play the game for yourself. I think it's a brash thing to say, but I wouldn't say it if I didn't believe it. We spent the first year of this project just working on the control system, and there wasn't even a concept that this was even going to become a Halo game. Without the controls working it's pointless even doing the game. One of our balance testers, who's a hardcore PC RTS guy, came up and said it's easier to play with a controller than it is with a

keyboard and mouse. I've seen enough people converted, and so I feel pretty confident in the actual statement. It's going to be amazing.

Being a console strategy game, how accessible will it be to the total strategy virgin?

The really cool thing about Halo



Ah, that'll be one of those Warthogs, then.



The graphics capture the Halo world perfectly.

"Strategy fans have to learn to love a Halo game, while Halo fans are going to have to learn to love a strategy game"



You can build a base to your own design.

> Interview continued

Wars is it's got to appeal to two sets of people. Strategy fans have to learn to love playing a Halo game, while Halo fans are going to have to learn to love playing a strategy game. For a mainstream player, you have to be able to introduce him to the game gently, almost to the extent that he doesn't even realise. We build up what we call the inverse pyramid, where you start doing something really simply and you slowly build that complexity in.

Have you still managed to maintain an element of depth?

That's one of the actual challenges, getting that deep gameplay in there without even making it look deep. An example of that is a base, which is built over seven plots of land at most. That looks like a very simple system that everyone can get right away, just like a mainstream game. But a hardcore gamer will think what sort of building do I do here? I've only got these seven slots, what do I build here? Do I build two supply pads? Do I build a supply pad and a reactor? By putting depth into something simple it sort of hides it.

Was it always the intention to make a Halo RTS?

No, we got a prototype running with the controls using the Age of Mythology engine, and all along Microsoft were saying you know this would be great if it was a Halo game. In the end we went and showed what we had to Bungie and they said great but what do you want to do with it? Then we started the

transition of turning it into a Halo game, talking about what Halo was about. If you look at Halo, you've got one guy on one side who's going to annihilate the entirety of the other side, so we had to make it more even.

Halo is renowned for being a gung-ho action game. Can you hope to replicate that with a strategy game?

Halo hits the ground running, it's right in your face all the way, and I think the thing that Halo's good at is getting you feeling as if you're part of something huge. You feel as if you're part of something absolutely massive, on a scale that is going to completely change the direction of humanity. And so I think getting that feeling into Halo Wars was very important indeed – getting that into the gameplay and into the person's emotions, into the person's head right away. It hits the ground running. ●



Publisher: Microsoft

Developer: Ensemble Studios

Heritage: Age of Empires,

Age of Mythology

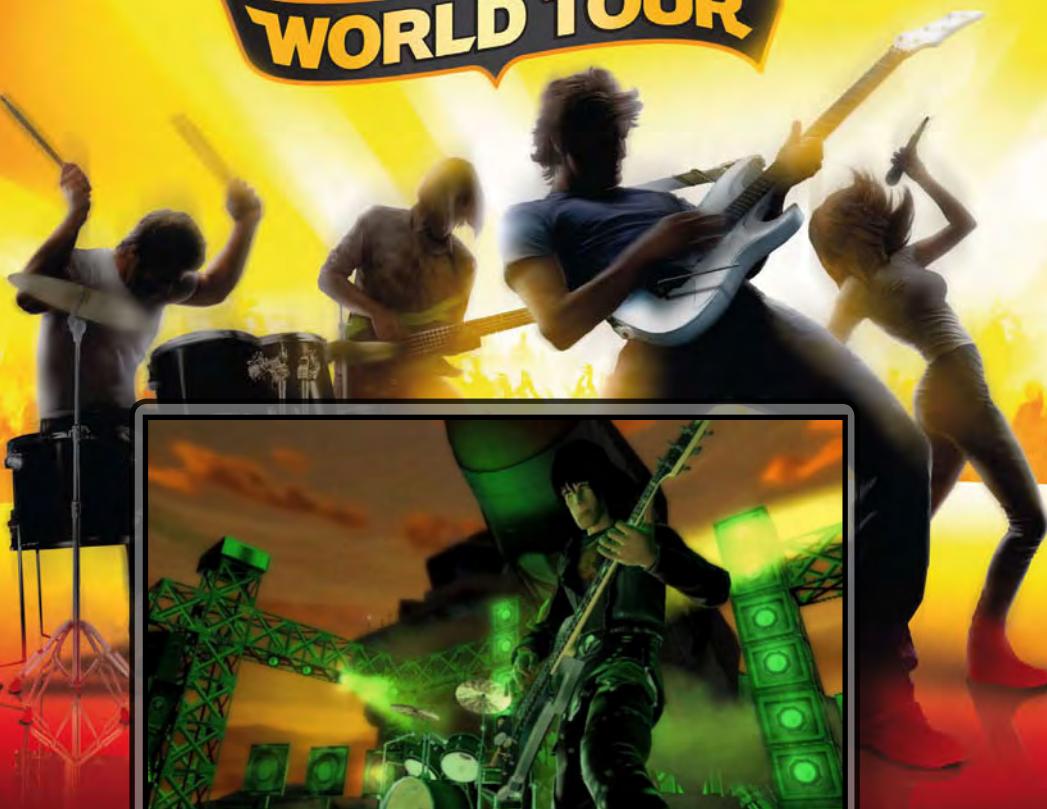
Link: www.halowars.com

ETA: February 2009



Graeme Devine, Lead Storywriter, Ensemble Studios

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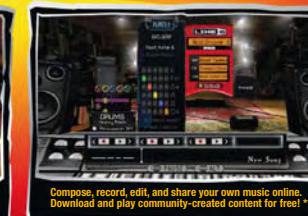
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CONTROL ➔





Previews



HANDS ON

Resident Evil 5

Zombies, Africa and a shotgun. This isn't going to end well

At Nottingham's recent GameCity event, we were subjected to something of a zombie overload. Falling over Halloween, this year's gaming festival saw the world record shattered for the largest gathering of zombies (some 1,227 people), along with a host of other Zombie-related activities, including the chance to go hands-on with Resident Evil 5. Like any other intrepid reporter, we happily

volunteered to brave the Nottingham nightlife – and the afterlife – to pick up the controller for one of the hottest games of 2009.

And from the second you jump into the game, everything instantly feels refreshingly like Resident Evil, especially if you've played Resident Evil 4. Your character moves in the same way, the viewpoint's very similar, and there's still an abundance of herbs, but this time round, a lot of emphasis has been



In co-op this should be great, but the AI needs a bit of work.

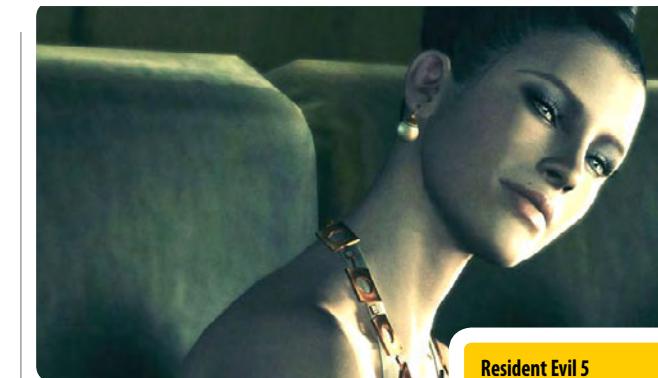


Graphically, the game excels, but the controls still leave a lot to be desired.

placed on making the game feel a lot more action based. Now, instead of having to pause to bring up the inventory, you just hold a button, and select what you want from a small, 3x3 grid that appears on the screen. Keeping the action flowing, it's even possible to quick-select an item you want from your inventory by just using the D-pad to do it.

Graphically, the game impresses as well, with real-time shadows adding to the atmosphere of dread, while the ramshackle shanty town provides an unusual, but totally real-world backdrop for the experience. We got to go hands-on with two levels during our trial, one of which had been demoed previously at E3. We'll be looking at the newer level here.

Starting off outside in a sand-swept alley, we found our way into a fragile-looking house, which we immediately



Resident Evil 5 promises to be a lot more story driven than previous games.

looted for items. After we'd finished taking the herbs and bullets, we headed out the front of the building, only to discover that we'd reached a dead end, with a large metal fence blocking our way. As we ran around in circles, desperately trying to figure out a way to open the gate, the situation suddenly got a lot worse, as zombies started pouring into the compound. Obviously in a bit of a situation, we





Resi 5 seems packed with action sequences, but whether you'll get to drive this truck is anyone's guess.



As with Resident Evil 4, zombies often have a little surprise waiting inside their freshly exploded head.

> Resident Evil 5 continued

backtracked into the building to try and form a last stand there – our AI co-op partner, Sheva, sticking close behind as we began to pick off zombies as they clambered over the fence. A few headshots later, and an ally radioed in to tell us he was on his way, but we'd have to carry on defending ourselves for a while, as he's still several miles away. No sooner had he finished talking, than a huge hulking goliath with a mallet smashed the fence down, and focused his rage on us. Brilliant.

But this had now opened the path into the rest of the level, so we quickly

I'LL BE THERE FOR YOU

Sheva's got your back



Co-op

Protection

Hope

Co-op

With a second player guiding Sheva, Resident Evil 5 co-op is sure to be great fun, but at the moment her single-player AI really isn't that good. Instead of lending a helping hand, Sheva ends up being a hindrance, as she shoots a zombie you've been so meticulously lining up for a headshot, causing your bullet to fly right over the recoiling enemy, who's just been shot in the gut.

ran past, and engaged in a huge game of hide and seek around a run-down marketplace. Every time he got close, the beast would swing his giant mallet, smashing several of the stalls into smithereens, before we nervously ran away, putting a few bullets into his flesh, having all the effect of shooting a tank with a pea-shooter.

But although this was terrifying for the first few moments, after a while we actually started to get bored. We didn't





Previews

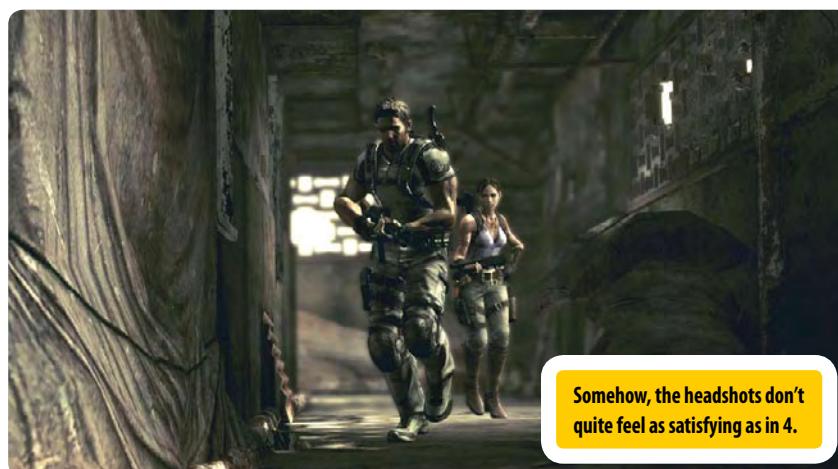
> Resident Evil 5 continued

actually have to hurt him at all – instead, all we had to do was survive, and this seemed like a disappointingly

basic mechanic. Sadly, the same was true for the second level – in the boss fight there, all we had to do was pump the chainsaw guy full of lead. We didn't have to shoot anywhere specific, we



The co-op mechanic does away with the feeling of isolation in previous games.



Somehow, the headshots don't quite feel as satisfying as in 4.

didn't have to trigger a certain event – all we had to do was shoot him, until he couldn't take any more. Basically a glorified damage sponge, this boss fight actually made Resident Evil 5 feel really uninventive and samey – the exact opposite of the feeling you got while playing the fresh Resident Evil 4.

Taking control

The controls were another point of contention with us, as they just felt incredibly awkward to use. With the default control scheme, you could walk with the left stick, and hold the right trigger to lift your gun, but then, in traditional Resi fashion, the aiming was on the left stick too, which felt a little bit odd on a dual analogue controller. The 'action' control method felt a lot better, but still left us with a feeling of separation from the action.

Overall, we're still positive about Resident Evil 5, but for the first time since the game was announced, we now have our doubts. We only saw a small portion of the game, so we're confident the rest will be filled with complex puzzles and inventive bosses galore, but if the game's going to succeed, the controls will definitely need an urgent looking to. ●

PREVIEW FEEDBACK!
Click here to tell us what you think of Resident Evil 5



HOW COMPLETE?

75%



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

90%

Looking good, but the control system needs work



Me have hammer.
Me smash your face!



The buildings in the shanty town are incredibly detailed.

15



PLAYBACK OPTIONS:



Microsoft
game studios

*For every choice, a different destiny.
Who will you become?*

Tragedy has brought you to a crossroads, and now you must choose.

Revenge or acceptance? Justice or retribution? But choose wisely.

The paths are many, their consequences severe.

And the future of Albion is in your hands.

Available 24 October 2008. xbox.com/fable2

FABLE II

Jump in.

XBOX 360. LIVE

CONTROL ➔





Reviews



Call of Duty: World at War

Publisher: Activision

Developer: Treyarch

Heritage: Spider-Man 2,

Call of Duty 3

Link: www.callofduty.com

OUT NOW

Fighting on two fronts

Call of Duty: World at War is very much a game of contrasts.

You've got the juxtaposition of two very different takes on WWII – seen through the eyes of a Russian private following the Red Army push into Berlin, and a soldier fighting the Japanese as they move into Okinawa. And then the troubling positioning of serious themes of revenge and the all-too-real horrors of war against thrilling, blood-splattered entertainment. And in

the most head-shakingly bad taste example yet, the introduction of new game mode Nazi Zombies, just as the end credits fade on the Campaign mode. It follows Brothers in Arms in promising to remain respectful to the war dead but then revelling in the violence with a little too much relish.

World at War is a very accomplished piece of programming – certainly when it comes to the Campaign mode, which is a taut, finely tuned ride



"World at War is very much a game of contrasts"

through some surprisingly varied environments. It still has the issues which go with the territory of an aggressively linear experience like this – namely, checkpoints leading to enemies magically disappearing, and AI glitches when you push further forward than the game wants you to – but then you'd have to be actively looking to break the illusion. Follow your sergeant as you're instructed by their regularly barked orders and you'll rarely spot >



The game's two vehicle sections are very enjoyable, but the tank-based level isn't a patch on the awesome seaplane stage.

CALL OF BEAUTY

What impresses most about Treyarch's return



Star power



Plane sailing



Ride or die



Star power

The voice acting is of a high standard, but it's the two Hollywood actors whose vocal work really adds to the cinematic feel of the game. You'll barely recognise Gary Oldman past his outstanding Russian accent as the volatile Reznov, while Kiefer Sutherland's bellow forces you to do exactly as he says.



Reviews



Flame on! You'll rarely see fire quite this spectacular.

It's easily the most brutal Call of Duty to date, with soldiers having their throats slit in front of your eyes and others having limbs blown off.



Roll over screen for annotations

> Call of Duty continued

'problems' like this. If you're looking for an immersive, atmospheric shooter, there are few finer – you'll visibly duck as bullets whizz past and find yourself automatically looking up as a crashing plane plummets earthward. And you'll exhale deeply when you just about pull off a retaliatory neck-stab when downed by a Japanese banzai soldier shortly before he guts you with his bayonet. The main difference between this and previous Call of Duty titles is that you're no longer battling troops who are fighting for their country –

instead, they're fighting for their lives, often fleeing, always frantically firing as they attempt to hold you off for as long as possible. It makes for a chaotic experience whose pace rarely lets up.

Indeed, that's one of the game's few real faults – there aren't enough times when you can take a real breather, with the story racing by in-between stage loading sequences, delivered by announcements rather than in-game. It means that you sometimes feel detached from the plot, and any potentially emotional moments are

stymied slightly by the refusal to allow the story to interrupt the near-constant skirmishes. It means that action junkies will relish almost every second, but those looking for something as soberingly satisfying as the bleak

Modern Warfare will find World at War comparatively lacking. That's despite the best efforts of Kiefer Sutherland and Gary Oldman, both putting in sterling vocal work – the two rank among the finest performances from Hollywood stars we've heard in a videogame, a far cry from phoned-in efforts in games we could mention.

Multiplayer is a mixed bag. Playing the campaign on a higher difficulty in co-operative mode is very exciting indeed, particularly when three others are involved. Not that your AI team-

"If you're looking for an atmospheric shooter then there are few finer"

FREEZE FRAME

Five steps to answering the Call of Duty



2 MINUTES

Vengeance is incredibly sweet as you turn the tables on those who held you hostage.



2 HOURS

Softly softly catchy Nazi. Sniping pays homage to All Ghillied Up.



4 HOURS

Burning 'em out – it's like a flaming hell on Peleliu Island.



6 HOURS

Entering the Reichstag, and not far from your journey's end.

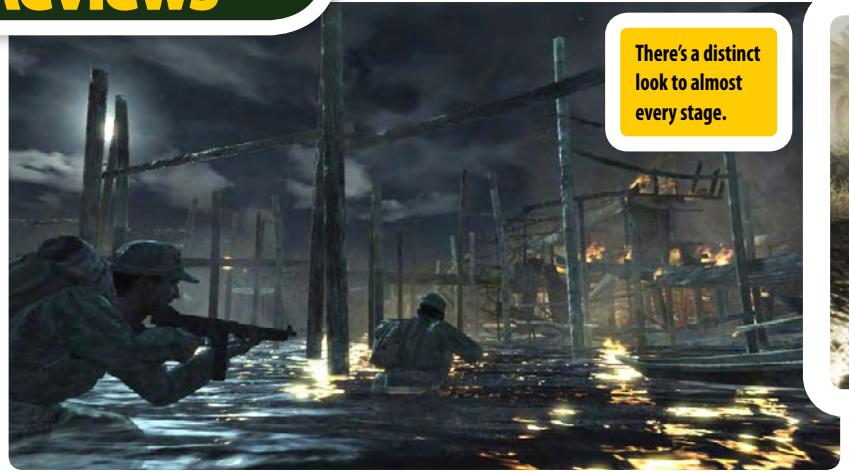


8 HOURS

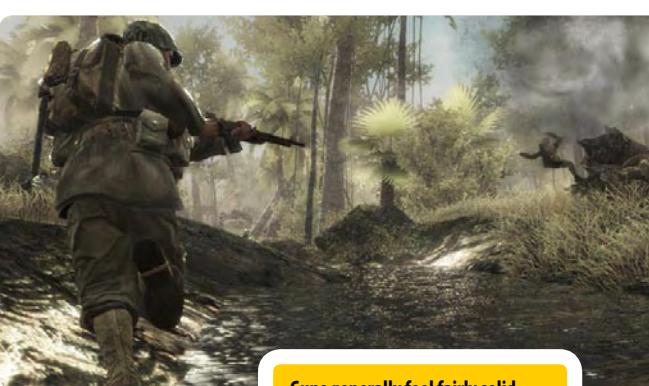
Returning in co-op mode, and tackling the competitive multiplayer – for a while at least.



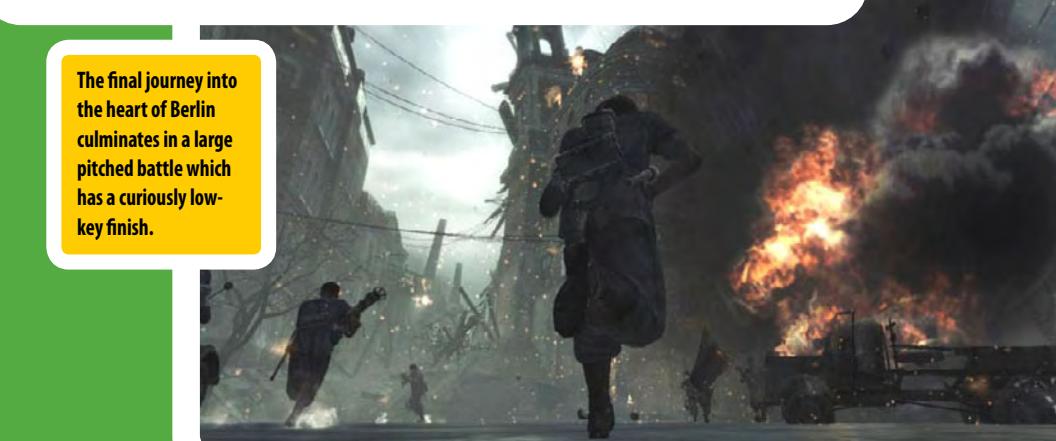
Reviews



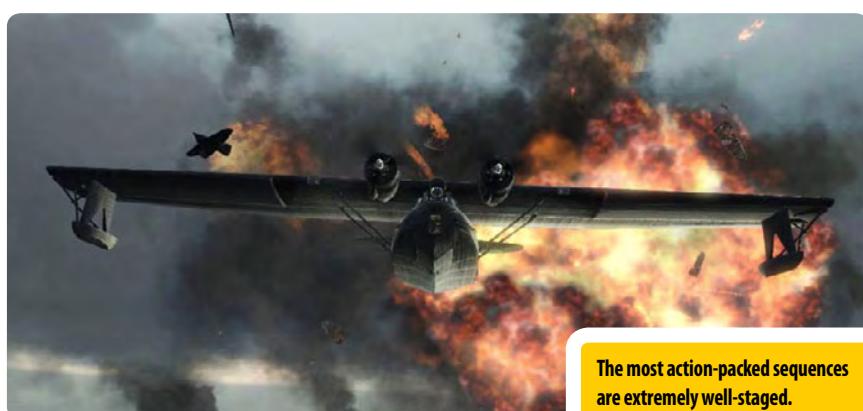
There's a distinct look to almost every stage.



Guns generally feel fairly solid, although not quite as meaty as their modern equivalents in CoD4.



The final journey into the heart of Berlin culminates in a large pitched battle which has a curiously low-key finish.



The most action-packed sequences are extremely well-staged.

PULSOMETER Signs of life

Near-death experiences



Fragments of Berlin



...Actually, it's great fun



Grenades? Where?



Nazi Zombies? Er...

setup of Modern Warfare it feels like a step back. Its best bits are essentially repackaged elements from last year's game, while any new aspects affect the balance negatively. It's fair to surmise that most players will stick with Infinity Ward's effort for their multiplayer kicks.

Modern Warfare was a very hard act to follow though, and it's testament to the hard work of Treyarch that this doesn't feel like the lesser game by too large a distance. If you've exhausted the previous title and are after more of the same in a different setting, then you can't go too far wrong with World at War. Just don't expect to be as blown away as some of the soldiers you'll send to their graves here. ●

> Call of Duty continued

mates are bad in the single-player, but it's more satisfying when working as a proper team. Even the occasional bout of AI cheapness somehow feels acceptable – these are troops struggling to fight a losing battle after all, and the number of enemies you'll face seems appropriate when you read real-life accounts of what happened, particularly in the East. Meanwhile, Nazi Zombies may be in poor taste, but it's undeniably good fun, forcing you and up to three others to protect a boarded up cottage from the undead. You'll spend points gained from successful shots on opening up more of the cottage, which both increases the number of hiding places and offers more points of entry for the zombies.

It's the competitive aspect where things start to unravel slightly – World at War provides a solid online multiplayer experience but nothing more, and compared with the supremely addictive and well-balanced

360Zine
Verdict

A sterling effort, but last year's game remains the series' best

Terrific graphics and satisfying gunplay

Outstanding sound effects and music

Weaker multiplayer than last time

86%

YOU'VE GOT 6 FANTASTIC WORLDS TO EXPLORE,
BUT AN UNLIMITED NUMBER OF WAYS
TO ENJOY THE RIDE.



BANJO-KAZOOIE

NUTS & BOLTS

The dynamic duo are back in their most constructive adventure yet. Battling against the evil witch Gruntilda across 6 fantastic worlds, Banjo and Kazooie need you to help them build an amazing array of vehicles in order to overcome more than 150 challenges and secure the future of their homeland. It's going to be quite a ride.

Microsoft
game studios



Jump in.

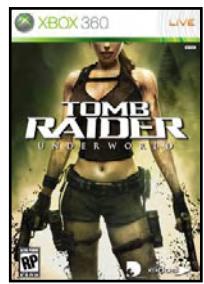
XBOX 360.

CONTROL ➔





Reviews



Publisher: Eidos

Developer: Crystal Dynamics

Heritage: The Tomb

Raider series

Link: www.tombraider.com

OUT NOW

Tomb Raider Underworld

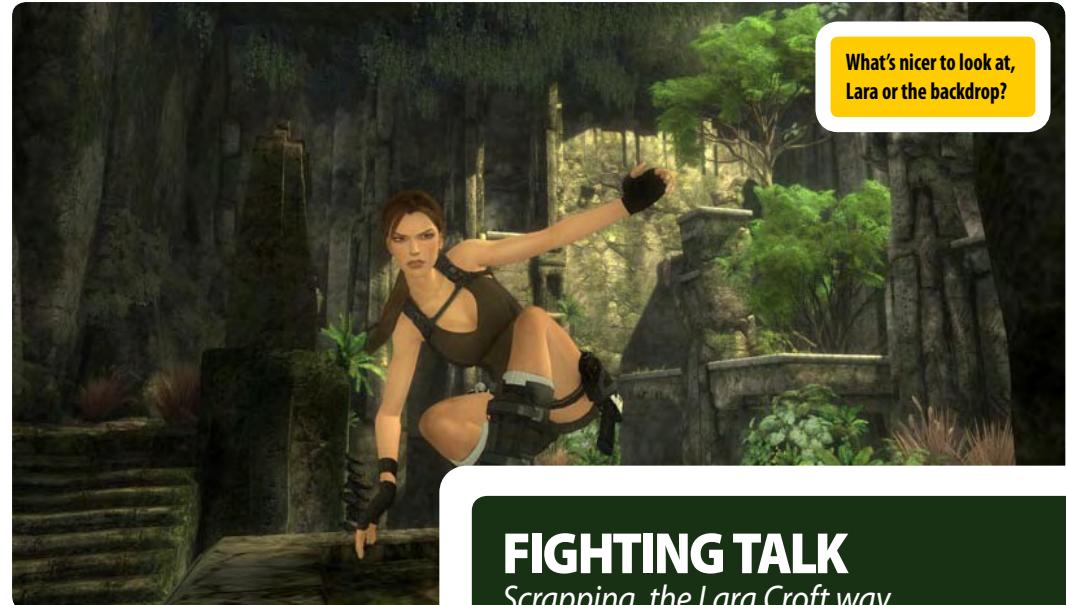
Is gaming's First Lady turning to the dark side?

Perhaps considered as the golden girl of gaming, Underworld puts Lara in a different light from the word go. With a dark introduction reminiscent of Hitman (complete with eerie music and FMV focusing on twin handguns), the opening movie sees Croft Manor in flames – with, shockingly, Lara as the culprit.

A quick prologue follows her escape from her burning home, giving gamers a chance to get back to grips with the controls, and also showing how it seems the Tomb Raider's quest has turned her against even her friends. From there the tone is set, and the game takes you back to where the story all begins, with Lara in the middle



In Underworld, the grapple is your friend. You'll use it to your advantage time and time again.



What's nicer to look at, Lara or the backdrop?

FIGHTING TALK

Scraping, the Lara Croft way



Split targeting

Fighting fit

In the jungle

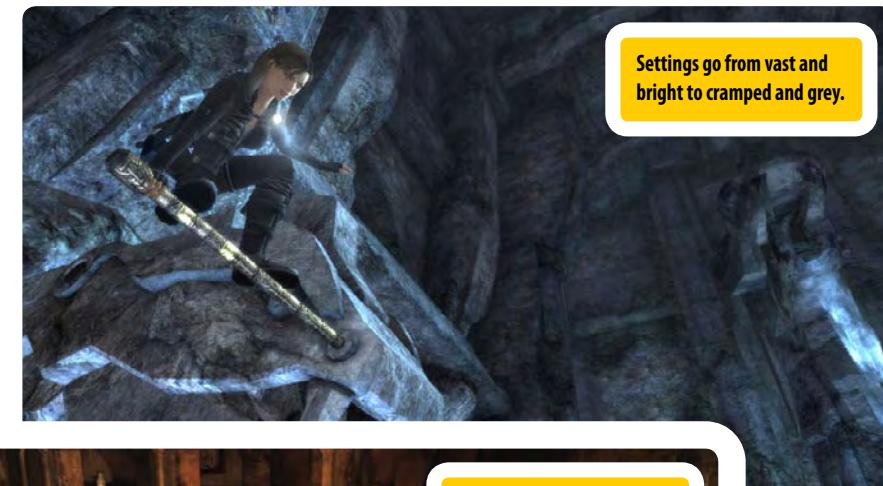
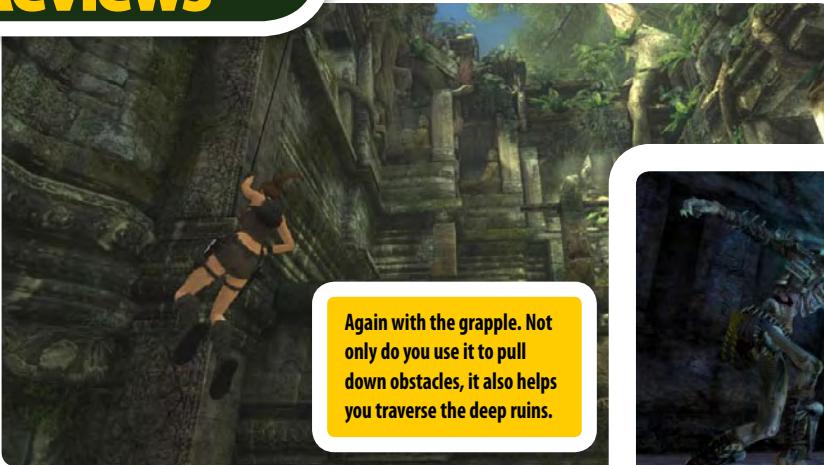
Split targeting

New to this game is the split targeting ability, allowing you to shoot two enemies at once. With multiple enemies being a regular issue, this gives you much more of a fighting chance.

This will leave you at times severely frustrated as you spend 10 minutes



Reviews



> Tomb Raider continued

trying to find out where the hell the next ledge to jump to is, or what you need to do to open the next doorway. But, in balance, you do feel a real level of achievement when you've beaten the latest challenge set before you. You'll get infuriated but you won't give in till you win, and in truth, that's one of the things we love about Tomb Raider.

The more you play however, the more you get into the Tomb Raider mindset. As you enter each new room you find yourself thinking like you're on the Crystal Maze – right, what do I have

here, where do I need to go, and how do I get there etc? Your eyes will find the climbable ledges quicker, you'll clearly see the route to your end goal in front of you, and the puzzles will just click into place. When you get into the groove you'll find a tough but rewarding game. One that may lead you to turning off the console in frustration, but one which will also have you coming back for more.

What also pulls you back into the world of raiding tombs is the game's gorgeous settings, which graphically >

**FREEZE FRAME**

Breaking the game down, one stage at a time...



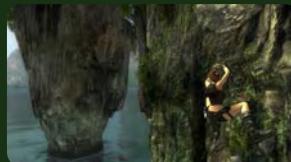
SUCKING YOU IN
Expansive backgrounds suck you in. Coming across this statue in the Thai ruins makes you stop in your tracks.



PROLOGUE
As the game's prologue, escaping Croft Manor is a very intriguing – and dramatic – opening.



QUICK REACTIONS
You'll often need to react quickly, especially when you're trying to escape from a burning, sinking ship.



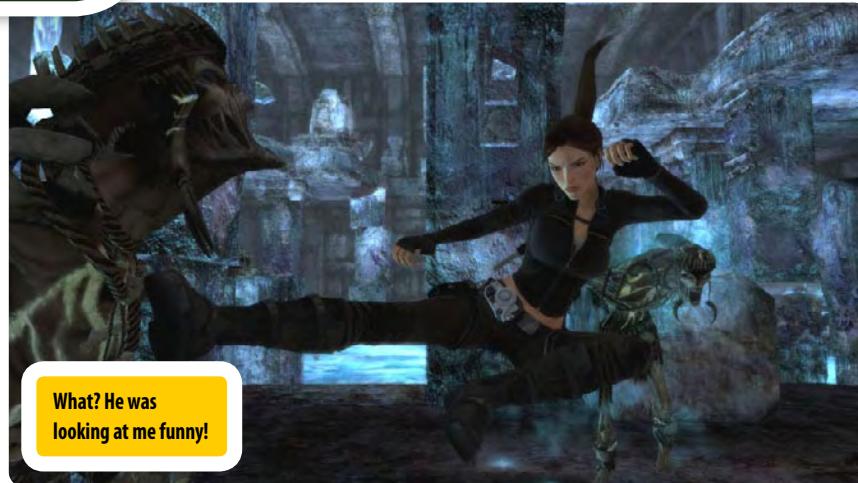
MILD AMUSEMENT
Lara's new abilities continue to amuse throughout the entire game. And the animation's spot-on, too.



LOSING YOUR HEAD
Timing continues to be key in Lara's adventure. Get it right, or get your head chopped off.



Reviews



What? He was looking at me funny!

> Tomb Raider continued

look amazing. You'll take a few seconds to draw in the beauty of each new area you enter, vibrant and colourfully rich in some cases, and dark and shadowy in others. Also adding another finishing

touch to the game is the detail of Lara's movements. For the first time, motion capture has been used and the difference is clear. She has a much wider range of movements available now, and this makes her feel more human. Climbing walls, balancing on



Roll over screen for annotations

beams, even the way she totters down staircases has an added touch of humanity now, and helps immerse you in her world.

Sadly, although the game is still highly enjoyable, it does have one, rather large flaw, which comes in the form of the camera. Many a developer has had this problem in the past, but we'd hoped not to see it here. Annoying in any game but especially in a 'platformer' situation, many a time we found ourselves teetering on the edge of a beam high over some ancient ruins unable to move the camera to see ahead. Yes, we admit that Lara does indeed have a nice rack, but we'd rather not have the camera zoom in on that rather than her feet in that situation, thank you very much.

This problem occurs quite regularly when hanging high up or trying to work out where to move to next, often leading to leaps of faith. Thankfully these often work out well, but when they don't and you have to clamber your way back up to that blind spot, this adds to the game's frustration level.

All in all, even with its flaws, Underworld is an enjoyable Lara

"Even with its flaws, Underworld is an adventure you'll work through to completion"

PULSOMETER Signs of life

The detail in the levels is amazing

Solving yet another puzzle!

The story becomes totally immersive



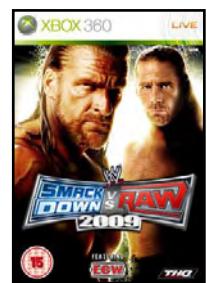
adventure that you will work through to completion. To say it's challenging is something of an understatement, yet it's definitely a game that will have you coming back for more. ●

360Zine Verdict

There are some minor niggles, but they won't stop you playing

- Gorgeous graphics and detail
- Tough but rewarding challenges
- Stupid camera

81%



SmackDown vs. Raw 2009

This year's game is a big hitter

Publisher: THQ
 Developer: Yuke's!
 Heritage: The SmackDown series
[Link:](http://www.smackdownvsraw.com) www.smackdownvsraw.com
OUT NOW

Picture the scenario... You've got a few friends round, and are utilising SmackDown vs. Raw 2009's redesigned Tag Team mode to engage in a bit of two-on-two warfare. Your partner's getting utterly destroyed in the ring and his momentum meter's depleted, but then a flame starts to glow underneath the bar. Slowly, he

crawls towards your corner and just as he's about to be cut off, he makes the tag. The crowd goes wild. You jump into the ring and use your newly gained finisher on your opponent. As your partner cuts off your other friend, you go for the pin. One, two, three...

One of the most redesigned features in this year's SmackDown game is the



Beth Phoenix has quite a mouth on her. Even her scream can knock Mickie over.

tag team matches, which have received a heck of a lot of strategic balancing and tweaking. The aforementioned 'hot tag' gives the matches a much more TV-like feel, and add an extra level of urgency in heated multiplayer bouts, but thankfully they're not the only tweaks in this year's game, as SmackDown finally feels like a true sequel again.

Reel 'em in

One of the greatest features in this year's game is the Highlight Reel. At any point, during any match, you can pause the game and access the Highlight Reel to view the last few seconds of the match. Of course, you have free control over the camera this whole time, and

BUILD A BETTER BRAWLER

Your wrestler, how you want it



Create-a-wrestler

Personality

Create-an-ability

Create-a-wrestler

Things are a bit different in this year's SmackDown game, but as the best place to start is from the beginning, you'll want to head to the Create-a-wrestler mode as soon as you can. Choose from the new parts, marvel at the physics-based hair, and make someone who looks like he could eat your gran.



FREEZE FRAME

How to wrestle with the game without any long-term scarring



15 MINUTES

Create your very own wrestler with the all-new parts supplied.



45 MINUTES

Now it's time to take your creation on the Road to Wrestlemania.



1 HOUR

The story's good, the action's great – bring a friend in to join you.



2 HOURS

Change track a bit, and get cracking on the Career mode.



8 HOURS

You're still going through the Career mode, levelling your person up.

> SmackDown continued

by pressing the A button, you can save the clip to your hard drive. And don't worry if you're lucky enough to have several amazing moments in a single match, as you can save a few clips at any time. Once you're done with the match, simply quit out and head into the Highlight Reel to edit them all together. It's great fun, and adds a real shine to the game.

Letting you add clips, choose camera angles and then add special effects, sound or commentary, the Highlight Reel is like a mini editing desk, but is as fully featured as you'd hope. Even better, when you're watching your matches back in slow motion, you'll notice little things you've never noticed before – from the sweat dripping down the wrestlers' bodies, to how realistic the facial expressions are. Once you've finished editing, you can upload the clip to a central server for all to see – much to the embarrassment of your friends.

Rounding out the fantastic new options are the Road to Wrestlemania, and Career modes. For starters, Road to

Wrestlemania lets you take one of six wrestlers through three months of story-based action, with several nostalgic points in there for long time fans. The commentary in these matches helps a heck of a lot as well, providing the same extra insight into the feuds as the commentators do on TV. For the first time ever, SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 also features a co-op story mode. Letting you and a friend play as either Rey Mysterio or Batista, this is easily one of the highlights of this year's story, and something we want to see make its return next year.

Plan a new career

On the other end of the scale, the Career mode is almost the exact opposite, letting you take any wrestler through a series of non-story driven matches, simply with the intention of building up your stats, unlocking awards, gaining new abilities and winning championship belts. When you pick your character, you'll be given an initial starting path, but where you go from there is up to you. Each week you'll pick an opponent and have a match, which will be rated, earning

"For the first time ever, SmackDown features a co-op story mode"





You can even make a custom signature move, using the Create-a-finisher.



There are also loads of divas to (ahem) get your hands on.



Look at the pattern on his trousers. You can tell things have had a lick of paint all round.

> SmackDown continued

you stars. Once you've collected a certain amount of stars you'll be able to challenge for a championship – win that, and it's onwards and upwards. This is the only Career mode you can use your CAW in, but it's also a great way for raising your stats. In each and every match you complete, you'll gain points depending on how you wrestled. If you use lots of submission moves, you'll grow into a submission master – beat your opponent senseless with a chair, and you'll become hardcore. It's a much more natural progression than the manual 'choose what you want to train in' from last year, and makes the whole process that much more involving.

It may have been on the blink for the last few years, but SmackDown vs.

PULSOMETER Signs of life

Creating a wrestler is always fun

There's no online achievements!

Get delved into the Career mode



Raw 2009 has made a huge comeback this year. Much like Hulk Hogan, you can never count SmackDown out – just when you think it's down, it'll hulk up, and come right back at you. ●

360Zine Verdict A great update with some clever and smart new features, too

Great Highlight Reel

Plenty of single-player depth

Feels like a true improvement

89%



Reviews



Mirror's Edge

A leap of Faith...

It's really best to think of Mirror's Edge as a platformer from an unusual perspective rather than a first-person shooter without guns. Especially as it does have some guns in it, but that's beside the point. It's parkour crossed with that jerky-cam chase sequence from the end of *The Matrix*. It's free-running where you spend most of your time free-falling. It's incredibly fluid at times, and frustratingly stop-start at others. It's a game which is easy to review but difficult to score. It's a bit of a contrary bugger, to be frank. Read on though, and all will be revealed.



You play Faith, a surly young woman whose job as a 'runner' is to leg it around the city's rooftops, staying out of the way of the Blues (police) while delivering packages of an unknown nature. On an early assignment, the cops seem a little more aggressive than usual, and it turns out Faith is a wanted woman – for reasons which will soon become all too clear. Her sister Kate is in trouble, too – a police officer framed for murder, her fate hangs in the balance while Faith attempts to clear her sibling's name. In truth, the plot's not really a highlight – flimsily constructed, the bulk of the story is

told in animated cutscenes, which look stylish enough but jar with the overall aesthetic. It would have been better to keep it all in first-person.

It's a particularly curious decision given how wonderful the game looks when you're playing. This might be a future dystopia, but it's a bloody good-looking one, all Ikea interiors, retina-bleaching white surfaces and mirrored glass. Hell, even the sewers look pretty. It makes a refreshing



It's one of the most striking game worlds you'll ever see – and the small graphical niggles don't detract from the wonderful consistency of the aesthetic.

PARCEL FORCE

Why you should have Faith in this delivery girl



Turn it up



**Hardcore
techno**



**Back for
more**



Turn it up

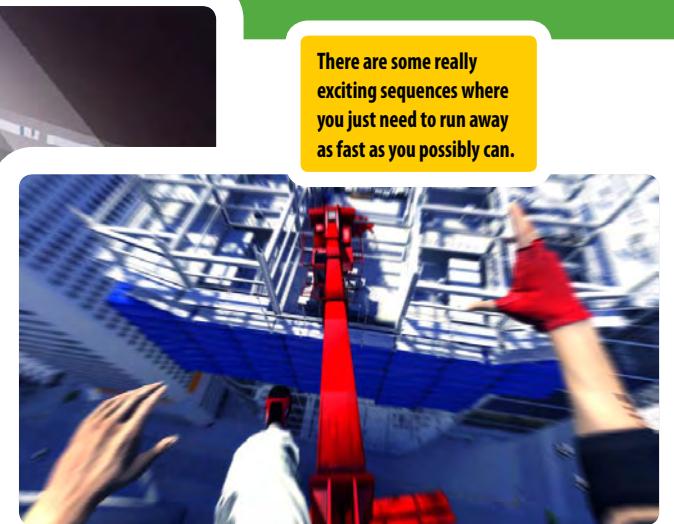
The best thing about the sound effects is that you almost don't notice them at first – a testament to how well they fit and how real they sound. Faith's breathing getting shallower and louder as she sprints, huffs of exertion as she drags herself up and the clank of her trainers on metallic surfaces.



Reviews



The animated cutscenes are visually striking, but they don't really fit with the fairly realistic look of the rest of the game.



There are some really exciting sequences where you just need to run away as fast as you possibly can.



Roll over screen for annotations

> Mirror's Edge continued

change from the browns and greys so prevalent this generation, and it was an inspired idea to set each stage at a different time of day to give the familiar a new tinge. Some textures look a little duff up close, but the idea is that you shouldn't be spending too long in one place to notice anyway – when at full speed, the world flies by in a blur, and you often won't have enough time to take in some of the glorious sights the artists have produced.

A game like this lives or dies on its controls, and Mirror's Edge almost gets

them absolutely spot on. They're unconventional, that's for sure – the left bumper used to 'move up' and the left trigger to 'move down', two commands which encompass a hell of a lot. It's the former you'll be using to leap between buildings, but it's also used to vault low obstacles or to clamber over railings to higher ground. You can use the latter to drop from high ledges, slide under hurdles or to crouch behind cover when being fired upon. It's a system which takes some getting used to, but it becomes pretty intuitive after the first

couple of chapters. Advanced techniques use a combination of the two, plus precision timing to get round the city quicker – these are something

which take serious practice to master, particularly as half the time you'll be concentrating on simply escaping from the Blues.

Note the 'almost' from the start of the previous paragraph. The truth is that Mirror's Edge can be truly finicky at times about what it asks of the player, requiring something close to pinpoint precision on some jumps. On the default controller sensitivity, it's often too twitchy, making it sometimes difficult to line up a straight leap, and you'll find Faith falling to her death



FREEZE FRAME

A hop, a skip and a hefty jump through Mirror's Edge



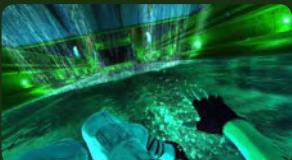
10 MINUTES

Finally nailing that jump onto that pipe at the fifth attempt.



2 HOURS

Descending down into the sewers – and getting quickly back out again!



4 HOURS

One of the shortest and most unusual 'boss battles' ever.



6 HOURS

Messing about on boats – and getting closer to the truth.



8 HOURS

Climbing The Shard, but watch out for those snipers...



CONTROL →





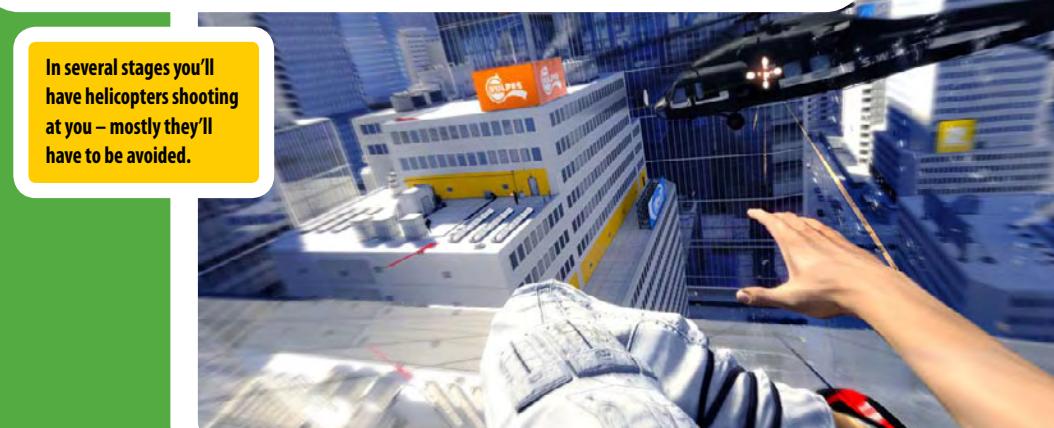
Reviews



Expect to fall often. It'll take some time before you instinctively know when you can make a jump or not.



You'll need more than just straight punches to get past your opponents' defences.



In several stages you'll have helicopters shooting at you – mostly they'll have to be avoided.

Hand-to-hand combat is a little awkward, as it's all too easy to run or slide past moving opponents.



> Mirror's Edge continued

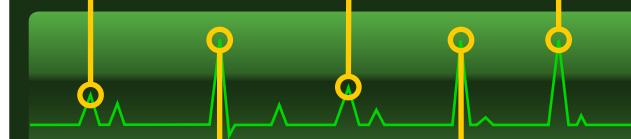
more than is entirely enjoyable. There's a fine line between challenge and frustration, and too often things tip over into the latter category. One section in a mall requires not only skill but luck – with police firing on you, it's down to chance whether you make the leap intact. Of course, you could venture down to take them out, but given the awkward melee attacks and clunky gun combat – presumably deliberate, as there are rewards for pacifism – you'll be reluctant to do so. These spikes aren't too plentiful, but seem to be there purely to extend the game's lifespan – most will probably complete the game in around seven to eight hours, and it took us just under nine. But, having said that, Mirror's Edge really is the perfect length – any longer and repetition could potentially set in – it's a testament to DICE's design skill that it mixes gameplay elements up enough to prevent boredom.

PULSOMETER Signs of life

The learning of the ropes

The annoyance of the mall

The addiction of the speedrunner



Longevity isn't an issue, however – speedruns and time-trials see to that – and the game becomes vastly more enjoyable on a second playthrough, when you're no longer wondering whether Faith can really make that seemingly impossible jump, or if that handhold is within reach. Here, the parkour becomes more fluid, and you can spend time appreciating the glorious playgrounds DICE has given you to leap around.

For all those moments of controller-hurling irritation, you won't have played anything remotely like this before. As a truly envelope-pushing title, Mirror's Edge undoubtedly deserves to be experienced. ●

360Zine
Verdict

Unique, thrilling and essential gaming

Stunning aesthetics

Utterly exhilarating in places

A few cheap difficulty spikes

85%



NAVIGATE ➔

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In 360Zine Issue 26



2009

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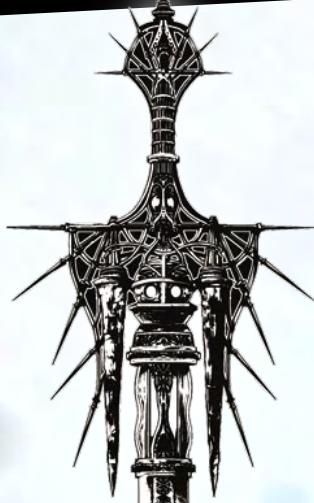


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EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW

Massive hands-on guide inside...



INTERVIEW

HIROSHI TAKAI

*The Last Remnant
director talks tactics,
tradition & technology*





Welcome

It can sometimes be difficult for a developer to diversify from the genre it specialises in. Square Enix is undoubtedly the master of the Japanese role-playing game (or JRPG for short) and has released a number of classic titles which have appealed to a great many gamers in its country of origin. Yet, outside its most popular series – the Final Fantasy titles – the genre isn't nearly as popular in The West. With the Western videogame market on the rise, Square Enix needed to broaden its range a little – and it has done so effectively with *The Last Remnant*. It's a game which stirs in ingredients from traditional JRPGs but infuses those elements with a sprinkling of Western-friendly mechanics – a very different type of turn-based battle system that plays out almost like a strategy game, and characters, weapons and a general aesthetic which are more cosmopolitan than you might ordinarily expect. It has had a tremendous localisation, with cutscenes that are fully lip-synced with the Western dialogue, and a script that avoids the stilted, earnest feel of many more po-faced role-playing games.

In short, it deserves to be the breakthrough European hit the company is hoping it will be. We spent several hours playtesting the early part of the game, and were impressed by what we saw. Read our impressions over the next few pages and find out why you should be getting excited about one of the biggest RPGs of this year.

Enjoy the issue,

Chris Schilling

"The Last Remnant boasts characters, weapons and a general aesthetic which are more cosmopolitan than you might ordinarily expect"



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left,
or click here to see the enhanced version!



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PREVIEW

The Last Remnant

Exclusive hands-on with Square Enix's latest epic

The Last Remnant is a hugely significant title for Square Enix in that it represents this proud Japanese company's clearest statement of intent yet to attract a western audience. It might still have a turn-based battle system, and weave its story around a young man with a hitherto-untapped power, but in so many other respects this is a clear tilt at the western



market. The Square-published *Infinite Undiscovery* took baby steps towards establishing the publisher in

Europe and the US, but *Last Remnant* is a much more confident and purposeful stride forward into relatively uncharted territory for one of Japan's biggest videogame companies. But can the actual game live up to such lofty expectations?

From our time spent with the game we'd have to say yes – *The Last Remnant* manages the tricky balancing act of appealing to both a western and Japanese audience, without ever seeming like a compromise. It could potentially have been a game with an identity crisis, but it mixes familiar elements of old JRPGs with more western-centric design decisions that will

Publisher:
Square Enix
Developer:
Square Enix
Heritage:
Final Fantasy
Dragon Quest
Kingdom Hearts
Link: www.lastremnant-game.com
ETA: 20th Nov



Athlum - Xiphos Way

Athlum is the first town area you'll come across, and is the place where you'll meet the Four Generals – proud warriors who represent the Athlumian army.



As you move around townships your cursor will shift around to highlight items and people of interest – most offer simple background but some can provide side-missions.

undoubtedly please those who've thus far resisted the charms of this particular genre.

The action starts when a young man named Rush Sykes (whose moniker just about epitomises the culture-clash here) runs into



"The Last Remnant will appeal to both a Western and a Japanese audience"





THE
LAST
REMNANT



Rush's sister Irina is kidnapped as the game begins by a group of soldiers, the leader of whom makes use of a powerful flying Remnant to spirit her away.



> The Last Remnant continued

trouble while looking for his missing sister. Stumbling upon a huge battle between two large armies, you're immediately thrust into an opening skirmish which doubles as an introduction to the game's combat mechanics. Instead of controlling single units, you'll fight using unions – groups of two or more combatants who will all act according to your commands. While this opening battle is pretty simple – your enemies are finished off with a blast from a gigantic weapon which is one of the mystical remnants of the title – things get quite a lot more complex. Are you sitting comfortably? Then let's begin.

THE ENEMY WITHIN

Battles begin when you encounter an

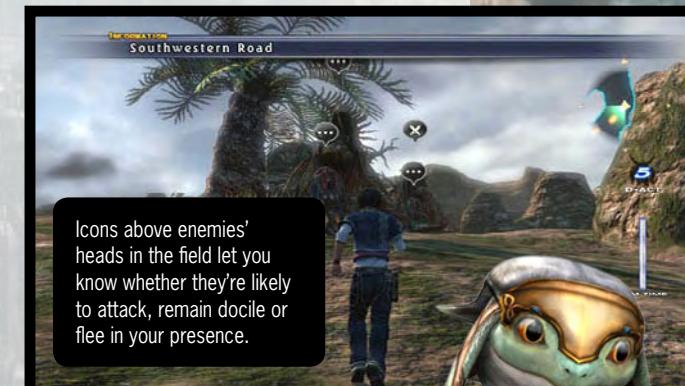
enemy while exploring – rather than random encounters you'll be able to see your foes in the field, and can avoid them if you're not in the mood for a scrap. Engaging in combat is a simple matter of pulling the right trigger when you're within range, whereupon a circle appears, with any creatures inside brought in to fight – allowing you to tackle multiple enemies at once, for higher risk but greater reward. Getting hold of enemies isn't quite as simple as this sounds – icons above their heads let you know whether they're likely to approach or flee when they spot you, and should you bump into a

Pagus is your standard magic user – good with the spells, but needs to be kept protected, as he's fairly weak otherwise.



"Engaging in combat is a simple matter of pulling the right trigger"

monster before you've had chance to squeeze that trigger then they will start with the upper-hand in battle. Get there first and you've got a much better chance of settling things quickly and efficiently. Once you've entered the battle screen, there's quite a lot of information to process,



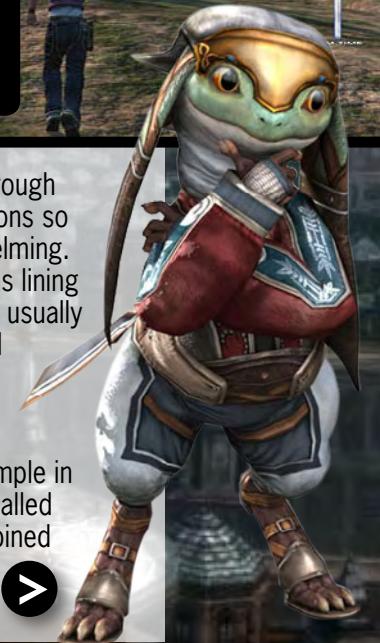
Icons above enemies' heads in the field let you know whether they're likely to attack, remain docile or flee in your presence.



Use the Play and Stop controls to the left, or click here to see the enhanced version!



though it's all drip-fed through the first couple of dungeons so things never get overwhelming. You'll see your own unions lining up against the enemy's – usually each major character will get one union each, with one or more member to fight alongside the chief protagonists. So for example in an early trek to a place called Robelia Ruins, we were joined by Pagus, a member of an amphibious race





Command and conquer

Let battle commence...



First Strike



Mastering the arts



Locked and loaded



First Strike

It's important to make sure you start battles on the front foot – catching an enemy unawares or simply ensuring you draw them in before they bump into you is important for team morale. Should you stumble into a creature in the field, the legend Enemy Advantage will be displayed, your union's morale will drop significantly and they will get a free attack.

> The Last Remnant continued

named qsiti, who gave us the power to use mystic arts – or magic, if you're a little more traditionalist - in combat. Rather than just simple 'attack' or 'defend' commands, the orders you can give a union are a little more specific – 'attack with combat arts!' uses up more action points (AP) than its more straightforward equivalent, while you can also ask unions to reserve their strength to a certain degree by asking them to 'keep your HP up' which will usually involve one troop in that particular union attacking while the other uses a health potion.

TRADE UNION

These commands change regularly throughout the battle sequences, however, depending upon the current situation – should an allied union be struggling, you'll be able to dash to their aid with a command of 'save them, no matter what' – risking one union to rescue



On the opportunities where you get a special action command during battle, a perfectly-timed button press can often lead to further chances to enhance your union's attacks.

"It's important to make sure you start battles on the front foot"

Roll over screen for annotations



Emma Honeywell may not have the most threatening name, but she's a battle-hardened soldier with a stern manner.



THE
LAST
REMNANT

> The Last Remnant continued

another. Orders are also affected by the morale bar, which ebbs and flows during the course of each skirmish according to which side is on top. The positioning and timing of your attacks is key, as you can flank

QUICKFIRE QUIZ

"Battles can be frenetic, particularly when several unions are fighting it out"

enemies to deal more damage, or even get flanked yourself, or interrupt an enemy rushing towards your back line by leaving one of your unions in the way. Once you've engaged with an enemy union, you enter a state of Deadlock, which sees both unions battle it out until one is down – and once you've defeated all unions, the battle is won.

There's even more to it than that, with the likes of Guest Unions who you cannot assign battle commands to, and Botches – which occur when a union's leader falls and you won't

INFORMATION

Ivory Peaks

When in the field you can slow down time via your talisman – squeeze the right bumper and you have extra time to drag enemies into battle, or to escape their grasp.

CONTROL ➔



be able to order them around until the end of the fight. It might sound a little bewildering, but it soon becomes second nature when you're playing and leads to some frenetic, chaotic battles, particularly when several unions are fighting it out. There are even timed commands that lend a bit more urgency to proceedings once you've issued your orders – simply pressing the right button at the right time can execute a Critical Trigger – for a more powerful attack or more effective defensive manoeuvre (often with the added sting of a counter). Should you find your team's morale high, you'll even get the opportunity to immediately repeat the process, when the legend 'teamwork' appears – allowing you to chain attacks for

extra damage or additional points which affect the loot you're able to take home once you've finished.

RETAIL THERAPY

Venture into the game's towns with your hard-earned spoils, and you'll notice that each one is split into a series of small areas, with the notable shops and other points of interest highlighted on the city map, allowing you to see at an instant where you need to be, rather than aimlessly wandering around, trying every door to see what you can find. It's an impressively streamlined system, that, coupled with some very short loading times, cuts down the busywork found in many other JRPGs. You'll find the usual item, weapon, armour and





THE
LAST
REMNANT



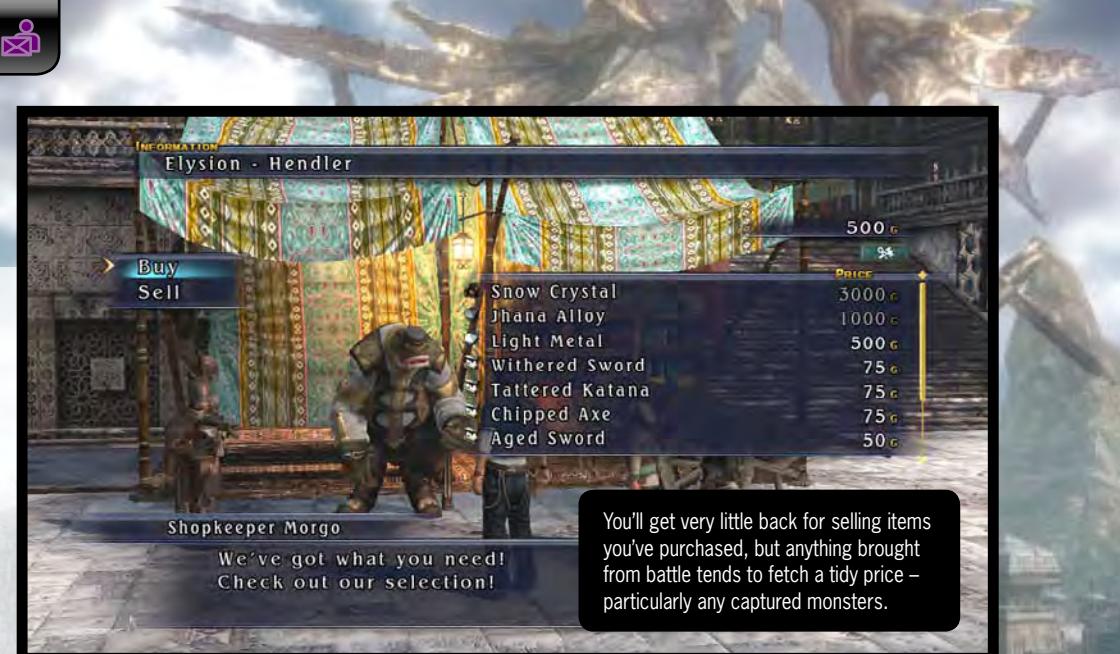
> The Last Remnant continued



potion shops, and if the first town of Athlum is anything to go by, there will be plenty of pubs and guilds to visit – the former useful when requiring information about sidequests and the like, with the latter providing other missions to level up your characters or just to provide a break from the main story quests. Should you happen to be about to visit a particularly dangerous area, you can even spend money on hired muscle to help you through the more difficult encounters. Another neat touch is the ability to sell on the bodies of the monsters you slay for significant profit, or to split their corpses into their constituent parts, which are less valuable, but often used in items or armour.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

This being a Square Enix title, The Last Remnant's presentation is typically polished, with large and well-animated characters and detailed backdrops. The character and enemy designs are exceptional, while the voice acting is generally very impressive, and it's nice to see that lip-syncing matches the western dialogue. Meanwhile the music offers something a little less traditional than your standard RPG themes,



"The Last Remnant is all about taking things in a different direction"

with some pulsing rhythmic percussion and the occasional squealing electric guitar lick changing things up a little from the usual orchestral bombast. Indeed, The Last Remnant is all about taking things in a different direction – there's even a little blood spray when you connect with your attacks, which is unusual for a Square Enix game.

Yet JRPG fans needn't worry, either – there are still enough spiky-haired heroes, gigantic fish-people, ridiculously large swords and charmingly innocent characters and



This fearsome fish-man is an ugly brute named Blocter, whose powerful axe blows can deal devastating damage to enemy unions.

story events to keep traditionalists hooked. For a game which risked appearing schizophrenic by the way it mixes elements of both eastern and western-centric role-playing games, it's remarkable that it retains its own definite identity - with a deep, tactical combat system welded to a thoroughly enjoyable bit of escapist hokum. In mixing those exciting battles with a compelling story, Last Remnant really does offer the best of both worlds. ●



CONTROL ➔





INTERVIEW

Hiroshi Takai

The Last Remnant director discusses tactics, tradition and technology

Hiroshi Takai has worked on the battle systems for several Square Enix games, making him the ideal candidate for director of a game whose combat is entirely unique to the RPG genre. We spoke to the man

behind these inventive fight mechanics to find out exactly what makes the game tick.

The Last Remnant has a really innovative battle system. How did the idea for it come about?

When development of the previous game was completed, I started getting ideas together with a desire to create a new game where the player only needs to enter one command to get all the characters in action. This basic concept was somehow stored in my

head from the beginning but, frankly, I have no idea how it got in there.

Was the idea of a more tactical combat setup inspired or influenced by any other games?

We held "brain storming" sessions on the basis of the aforementioned basic concept and began to cast them into shape such as the union formation and the moral gauge. As for what inspired us, I suppose that games we have been involved in before must have given an influence and so must various other games, films and animation works that we have personally experienced. However, any possible influences would have been only given



Takai-san has been working on Square Enix titles for over fifteen years, with the Romancing SaGa series among his best-known work.

CONTROL ➔



"We attempted to shift our usual style of visual expressions towards something more realistic"





THE
LAST
REMNANT



Early battles can be over in just a few turns, but larger boss creatures and more epic battles require constant readjustment of tactics.

> Interview continued

on my sub-consciousness and I cannot single out exactly which ones have inspired me.

The game seems to be geared more towards a western audience than previous Square Enix titles. Was it difficult to break with tradition and attempt something that was less obviously Japanese?

I regarded it as a positive challenge to keep all JP, US and EU in mind regarding game appearances and the in-game universe. On the other hand, we had a really tough time localising the game and coordinating the development schedule in order to release this work simultaneously.

Unusually for a Square Enix title, when you make contact with



It's best to try and keep all your unions alive to give you greater strength in numbers – even if one group is low on energy it can still turn the tide in battle.

"We took the policy to increase in-game realism – the blood came with it"

your weapon, you'll see a bit of blood. Is that down to the desire to appeal to a western audience who seem to accept more realistic violence? Will the Japanese game lose that blood effect?

In this game, we made attempts to shift our usual style of visual expressions slightly towards something more realistic. Following these efforts, the characters and the background are depicted more

realistically and we thought the game would look strange unless blood and bodily fluids are described as well, as they would naturally be visible when an attack is made. I could say that we took the policy of increasing the level of in-game realism in order to appeal to Western players and expressions of blood came with it consequently. Considering the Japanese sense, it would be less likely that home players find bloody scenes uplifting. However, we are prepared to express blood as necessary, particularly if lack of it would cause a feel of incongruity or negatively affect the consistency of the game concepts.

Are you concerned that this switch to a more western-friendly style of gameplay will alienate Japanese gamers or those fond of traditional JRPGs?



The longer a battle goes on, the greater your chances of being able to pull off more powerful, specialised attacks.



CONTROL ➔





Allies

MORALE

Action
攻撃
攻撃
攻撃



> Interview continued

appealing to Western players, the “Japanese taste” would invariably be exuded out of it. As long as the game has this “taste” within it, I think it will always be found enjoyable by Japanese players as well.

Is The Last Remnant intended as a one-off standalone title, or are you hoping it will be the start of a long-running franchise?

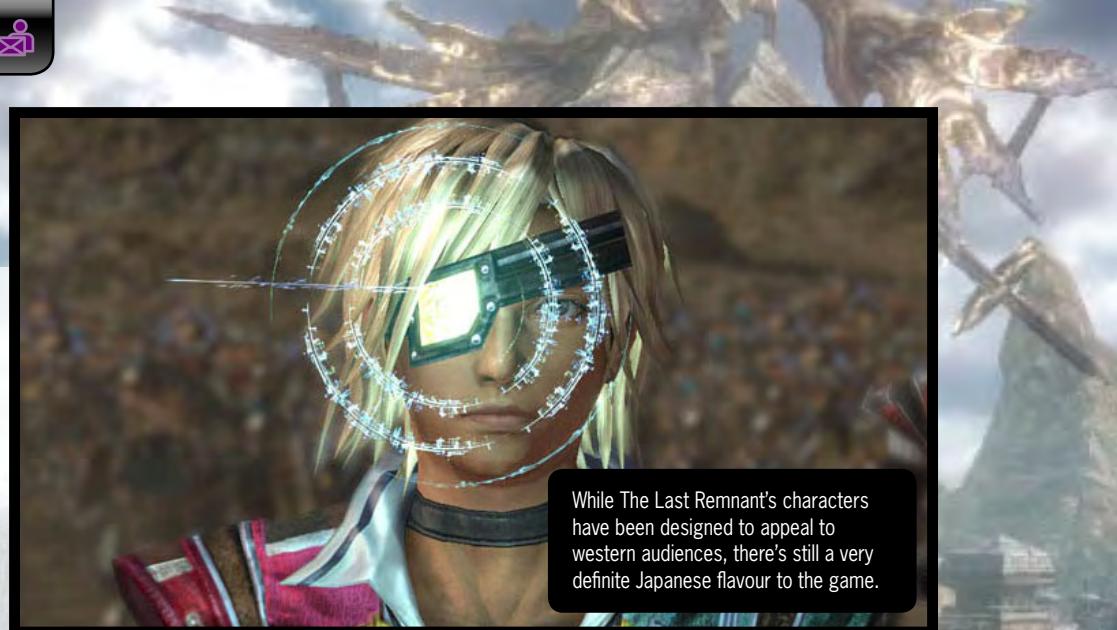
Regarding the in-game universe, it has been made to have the potential

“The in-game universe can expand itself as far as we want it to”

of expanding itself as far as we want it to. Having said that, the possibility of making it into a series was not on my mind during the development stages and, even now, I have no immediate intention of moving on to make a sequel.

There's a lot going on in the

It's unusual to see a Japanese game with blood visible in combat, but The Last Remnant is no Gears of War in the gore stakes.



While The Last Remnant's characters have been designed to appeal to western audiences, there's still a very definite Japanese flavour to the game.

battle scenes, with plenty of characters fighting on screen at once – do you think that this proves that Japanese developers are catching up with Western ones when it comes to making the most of the current-gen consoles?

I feel as though I have finally begun to see various issues as the first work has been completed. I am aware of aspects which would be improved if we were to produce a game now and have gained some confidence in taking on the current-gen and next-gen consoles in the future. With our next work or the one after, we may be capable of competing on even ground against games released by top developers in the West.

The game's towns and other settlements are unusual in that they're split into bite-sized

sections to minimise the time spent wandering around. Will the game feature some larger areas to potentially get lost in, or is the whole game more streamlined than other more epic role-playing games?

Although the maps with no “symbol targets” have been streamlined, there are still some huge dungeons in the game.

As for the story, will we find out exactly how the Remnants arrived in the world, or is that to be kept as a mystery?

Please save it till you find out yourself by playing the game!

Finally, which aspect of the game are you most proud of?

It is the sensation the player can enjoy during a battle. I expect you will experience an adrenaline rush especially in a battle against a powerful boss enemy. ●



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